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ABSTRACT

To offset sex-related chauvinism in the teaching of language and literature in the university, we must not only revise our courses, but we must also recognize and combat the inherited attitudes toward sexual roles disseminated in elementary and secondary schools. Furthermore, we need to neutralize any prejudiced concepts which the student may have previously assimilated. Teachers should enable students to recognize for themselves instances of sex bias in their previous education and to guard against the acceptance of such ready-made attitudes and distortions in their college experience. Teachers could begin a discussion of sex bias in culture with questions surveying the student's previous experience which could follow with discussions allowing students to compare views on the roles of men and women in our society. Through an exploration of literature, folk humor, television programming, advertisements, and other forms of media, students can focus upon the prejudice implied and the sexual stereotypes which are thus perpetuated. In this way the student can recognize occasional bias in otherwise sound literary criticism or other forms of communication. (HOD)

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MALE AND FEMALE CHAUVINISM IN THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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While some believe that women in the liberation movement define the enemy as MAN, most feminists regard the enemy of both men and women as the sex-role stereotyping which determines the thinking of children, restricts the development of both men and women, and sets limits to women's economic and vocational attainments. Male chauvinism thrives only where such rigid preconceptions replace logic, and female chauvinism may, in turn, emerge when women, seeking to destroy sex-role bias, themselves create, through a counter-rhetoric of absolutes, new and potentially imprisoning stereotypes for themselves and others. To offset sex-related chauvinism in the teaching of language and literature in the university, we must not only revise our courses. We must also recognize and combat the inherited attitudes toward sexual roles disseminated in elementary and secondary schools. We need, furthermore, to neutralize any prejudiced concepts which the freshman may have previously assimilated. Otherwise, he will have no critical standards to set in perspective those college English courses which are weakened by sexual bias or to allow him to respond fully to those which are not.

I

Rather than focussing upon the chauvinistic teacher, those who have conducted surveys seeking to determine the extent of sex-related bias in the teaching of English have tended to center upon examination of textbooks. In their tabulations such surveys parallel studies made in the 1950's which assessed racial or class discrimination in textbooks. The Women's Caucus of the Modern Languages proposed, unsuccessfully, to the delegate assembly last December that the MLA undertake a comprehensive review of sexual bias in English textbooks similar to that undertaken by the NCTE on racial bias. In partial response to this proposal, four MLA workshops on the future of textbooks, scheduled for the 1972 convention, will consider possible anti-feminism in books.

An important recent book, Dick and Jane as Victims (Princeton, 1972), summarizes a National Organization of Women survey of sex-role stereotyping present in 2,760 stories in 134 elementary school readers published by fourteen major firms. The survey includes these revealing statistics:

Boy-centered stories to girl-centered in the ratio of five to two.
Adult male main characters to adult female main characters in the ratio of three to one.
Male biographies to female biographies in the ratio of six to one.

In the readers used in fifth and sixth grade, 27 female biographical stories about 17 different women occur, as opposed to 119 stories about 88 men. Women in the books represent 25 occupations, while men represent 147. The twenty-five for women include acrobat, baby-sitter, cafeteria worker, cashier, cleaning lady, cook, fat lady in a circus, queen, school crossing guard, school nurse, secretary, shopkeeper, teacher, telephone operator, and witch. Doctors, judges, astronomers, astronauts, athletes, architects, dentists, engineers, film makers, and veterinarians are uniformly men. In the stories girls do something "clever" 33 times, while boys save the day with a great idea or create something special, like a silver pitcher or a walkie-talkie, 131 times. In some stories, girls' names alone are mentioned or girls appear in the background of a picture--for instance, as cheering onlookers when a boy wins the race. Two generations have heard Jane say that she wants to be a doctor, but that, as a girl, she will settle for being a nurse. Dick asserts, "I will be an engineer,"

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while little Sally happily croons, "I will be a mommy!" Dick scornfully summarizes the situation by remarking that girls are stupid.

Sexual stereotyping occurs so flagrantly in elementary school literature that surveys detailing it seem gratuitous. In any reading textbook boys enjoy varied and exciting adventures while girls are teased by boys, frightened by boys, or excluded from their ball games. Girls help mother bake, wash dishes, sweep, and shop; and in their play time, they pretend to be mothers. Father sits in his easy chair reading the paper; while mother serves him, he sits at the head of the table, making the final decision on the family vacation; or else he stands before the Grand Canyon giving a four-page lecture on its geological development before mother suggests that she open the picnic basket. In our local schools Vistas (5th grade, Scott-Foresman) contains thirty-five stories; only nine include an important female character, and seven of these are about Helen Keller, who was a most atypical little girl. One of the other two stories portrays a frontier doctor who wants no money for her work, while the last recounts the failures of a group of girls who fix dinner--the Jello doesn't jell, the meat burns, the cake falls, the dog trips one of them.

The books which children study in their other subjects compound and reinforce the prejudices found in the language and literature texts. The Social Sciences, Concepts and Values (5th grade, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), used in our local schools, devotes only eight of its 374 pages to attempts made by American women to gain full equality with men and implies that they achieved such equality in 1920. A fourth grade math book, Modern Mathematics Through Discovery (Silver Burdett, Morristown, N.J., 1966), contains 250 problems involving men, 140 involving women, and only a handful involving both, since women seldom get out of the kitchen. They leave solely to use their impressive mathematics in order to buy pans, food, and cloth to make aprons. Of the only three adult females who are not fulltime mothers, two are teachers (addressed as Miss) and one is a cafeteria worker who has a kitchen-type problem.*

Since children through the third grade may spend over 50% of the school day in work related to their reading text and since their recreational books bombard them with similar stereotypes of the silly, easily frightened girl and the strong, dependable--though sometimes delightfully mischievous--boy, one must conclude that elementary school literature will program our children into rigid misconceptions about the relative nature of boys and girls and the relative achievement and ambitions of men and women. If American society remains repressive in its treatment of women, the reflection of society in elementary textbooks exaggerates the reality but does so with a subtlety that keeps the child from ever rejecting the portrayal as unrealistic. In real life women do get out of the kitchen, and girls organize their own ball game rather than pleading with boys to join theirs. The similarity in sex-role stereotypes in readers published in 1972 and those used in American schools at the turn of the century is remarkable. As individuals and as members of influential organizations interested in the teaching of reading and literature, we have too long pre-occupied ourselves with articles on word-counts and look-say methods and failed to demand radical revision of the conceptual treatment of human beings in the first literature children read for themselves.

II

Two studies, both reported last spring in Research in the Teaching of English, move beyond the consideration of sex-biased textbooks. Their authors suggest teach-

ing methods that recognize sex differences in adolescents, and they analyze differing reactions and achievements of boys and of girls when, in the one study, they use identical reading lists and when, in the other, their compositions are graded by identical methods. Both studies imply that adolescent boys are at a disadvantage if English teachers give them no special consideration. Identical treatment of all teenagers discriminates against boys who mature more slowly than girls. Because boys' themes rate lower grades even when the writers remain anonymous, W. Don Martin ("Sex in grading composition," 36-47) advocates (1) "male-oriented instruction in composition" to compensate for male immaturity and (2) more grading by fellow students who may react less negatively than teachers to poor penmanship and to "rebelliousness, independence, and argumentativeness," characteristics which he feels differentiate boys' temperament and writing from girls'. The study itself does not establish these characteristics as "male." The term "male-oriented instruction in composition" is also not defined, nor is it clear whether or not the girls will be given this instruction or taught in segregated groups. The study in its conclusions deals only with recommendations for boys.

Mary Beaven ("Responses of adolescents to feminine characters in literature," 48-68) compares the relative ability of boys and girls to identify with male and female charcters in books read for English classes in Cook County. She assumes that books should provide characters for the students to emulate, and she concludes that girls are impressed by male characters but that boys are not impressed by female characters. She therefore recommends that assigned readings contain strong male characters since both girls and boys can respond to them. (Parenthetically, she recognizes that one reason students did not find themselves impressed by female characters was that most of those in books read by the classes were "insipid or vicious." She suggests supplementing the lists with biographies of admirable women to provide models for the girls.)

Half of the girls tested could not respond to the three main questions: (1) the female character they most admired (2) the one they wished to imitate or resemble, and (3) the one they would choose for a mother. Some substituted unsolicited comments: "There haven't been any main characters that were women." "Literature has been geared toward what the guys in the class would most enjoy as my teachers firmly believed the girls will read anything." (This statement ironically anticipates the recommendations of the researcher.) In desperation perhaps, the girls chose as characters they would imitate: Juliet, Scarlett O'Hara, and Hester Prynne. Not far behind were Eppie, Aphrodite, and Anna Frank. They most admired Scarlett, Juliet, and Hester, in that order. For a mother, they suggested Hester, Penelope, and Ma Joad.

While I agree neither with all the assumptions nor with the interpretations of these studies, they indicate possibilities beyond the examination of textbooks for the study of teaching methods which must be adapted to both sexes. Varying rates of maturity in the sexes require flexibility in educational techniques. As these studies suggest, boys must be helped with special problems arising from their immaturity, but, as they do not suggest, girls should be recognized in high school English classes as high achievers and challenged; they should not be allowed to mark time while the curriculum is adjusted to the special problems of the boys.

III

I have tried to discover a way to measure sex-bias in the teaching of language and literature from kindergarten through twelfth grade which will at the same time measure a college freshman's awareness of such bias in his previous education. I have not yet succeeded. I anticipated collecting from new freshmen instances of

sex-bias in assignments, grading, class discussion, interpretation of literary works, or teacher-annotation of student compositions. I also expected them to explain why they identified these instances as characteristic of chauvinistic teaching. But I failed to realize that the effect of continued exposure to sex-bias is the acceptance of such bias as the norm. The student most affected by sexual bias in his thinking will be least able to recognize instances of prejudice. If I had not followed up the initial survey sheets with discussions, at least in my own classes, I might have concluded that almost no teacher in Iowa had in the last thirteen years shown evidence of sexual bias in his teaching.

In their responses, several women generalized casually and without resentment that all their male teachers had been chauvinists. This they saw as natural. Men should, after all, be proud of their masculinity, dominance, and toughness. These women described chauvinism in terms of their teachers' arrogant references to their wives, their neglect of them, their preference for the prettiest students, their telling of risque jokes, and their making comments that belittled girls in order to "get in with" the boys. Both black and white women complained of sexual, rather than racial, prejudice on the part of a teacher of the other sex. Both men and women complained of "female chauvinism" in teachers they disliked, but identified it only as the self-conscious attempt to call attention to their femininity, attractiveness, and helplessness. The term was never connected with female politics, female aggressiveness, or Women's Lib. Girls most often attacked the teacher who refused to call on eager girls but meanwhile solicited opinion from a passive boy. Since attempts to solicit male attention and excessive concern with superficial femininity might seem more characteristic of a male-dominated woman than of a female protest to male domination, the agreement among students of both sexes that only such behavior illustrates female chauvinism emphasizes the difficulty of defining the label except in terms of reaction to male chauvinism. Female chauvinism, at this point in our cultural history, is not yet a phenomenon parallel to male chauvinism, but rather an extension of it, reflection of it, or reaction to it.

In discussion, students agreed that girls have more aptitude for high school English than boys. While some assumed that math and science are for boys and humanities for girls, most concluded that their belief in the superiority of girls in literary study derived primarily from the assumption that women are emotional and that emotional sensitivity constitutes the chief requisite for literary understanding. While no student could recall hearing a teacher make a statement to this effect, most agreed that their English teachers--usually women--had convinced them that, although men may write most of the great literature, women alone can fully appreciate it. Only women can react intensely to a sonnet, understand a poem about nature, or respond to the nuances of sexual love. Men may be able to experience the thrill of terror in reading a Poe story or find a rational satisfaction in science fiction. If male chauvinism exists rampantly in elementary and secondary schools, most high school students may be impressed by a subtle female chauvinism which insists that if only men can write, only women can read.

In general, our freshmen do not recognize sexual bias in their previous education. English departments need not fear demands from such students that they immediately revise all literature courses to rid them of possible anti-feminist aspects. The most we can confidently expect is that at least one in every class will ask why Nora slammed the door of the doll's house.

10

IV

While we should try to define the nature and scope of sex-biased teaching in the English classroom, I think that this issue is less important than planning freshman courses in rhetoric or literature which will enable the student to recognize for himself instances of sex bias in his previous education and to guard against the acceptance of such ready-made attitudes and distortions in his college experience. The individual who is critical of sexual conventions as they affect everyday behavior will himself see other people as individuals and will reject all the patterns which limit the development of human beings. In such a climate of critical awareness, students entering the university ought to be able to discover which of their views are valid and which are not.

The teacher might well begin a discussion of sex-bias in our culture (in education, in literature, in the popular media) with questions surveying the student's previous experience. The discussions which would follow would allow students to compare views on the roles of men and women in our society. While most students may not at first recognize their own prejudices and their dependence upon stereotypes, they may recognize irrationalities and blindness in the comments of their peers. Though they may not at first question, as such, the chauvinism of various kinds which dictated their early education, none will have forgotten Dick and Jane and will recognize as adults the pernicious assumptions of male superiority in similar children's books.

Before long, students in a freshman rhetoric class can undertake impressively serious research on this subject. They can survey, for instance, educational materials, literary prizes, stereotypes in advertising and in television programming. While they will already have realized that women who endorse products on television are made to be slightly silly in order to seem "human," they may notice for the first time that at the end of the commercial the authoritative male voice vouches solemnly for the product's worth and instructs the viewer to buy it. Some students may wish to follow news reports covering the NOW petition submitted in New York City last spring, which attempted to get the license of an ABC station revoked because of blatant instances of prejudice against women in programming, news coverage and commercials. The petition included such facts as: (1) Softique commercials tell women: "Minute by minute you become a woman again." But men are never told they become men by soaking in the bathtub. (2) Of 1200 commercials monitored, women were depicted as household functionaries in 43%, as persons totally dependent on a man in 34%, as only sex object in 17%, and as dumb comics in 17%. (3) On the day seven of eight medals won by the U.S. in the Olympics were won by women, the sportscaster led off with "Thank heaven for little girls" and forgot to name the winners.

Some students find it difficult to question the apparent sanction extended by religion to the subordination of women. In a lesson concerned with semantics and language changes, one can consider the influence upon our present attitudes of such Biblical phrases and precepts as these: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head...as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man." "Her children shall rise up and call her bl ssed." "...one hundred forty four thousand men not defiled by women.""Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing.""Frail vessels." "Possessing one's vessel." "Helpmeet." "Quit you like men; be strong." "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" "Wives submit yourselves unto your husband." "Let the woman learn in silence in all subjection."

11

In such a consideration of language, secular idioms which minimize the importance of women also help convince the student that women habitually are seen as inferior. They do not exist in "man in the street," "land where our father's died," and "she took it like a man." When women are mentioned in familiar Americanisms, they are apt to be classified with children or property: "The hand that rocks the cradle," "Women and children first," "Woman's work is never done," and "Woman's place is in the home." In this connection, Casey Miller and Kate Swift (New York Times Magazine, Mar. 16, 1972), claim that woman in semantic terms, designates not a human species but a subspecies of man. To support this contention, they cite a research team's report on "the development of the uterus in rats, guinea pigs, and men"; a social studies text which states that the pioneers crossed the plains with their wives, children, and cattle; and an article in Britannica Junior on Man which begins, "Man is the highest form of life on earth" and nowhere mentions that mankind involves two sexes.

Another storage arsenal students can explore for expressions that belittle women is folk humor, including vaudeville and old movies. The woman driver, the mother-in-law appear over and over. The classic "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" and "Who was that woman I saw you with last night?" may make us think again about why we laugh. The shrew, the dumb blond, the Aunt Jemima, the haughty woman, the old maid need to be seen by the student along with the tight-fisted Jew and the squalid Injun who grunts.

Students will observe how little language has reflected the incresed education of women. A coed logically should be any student at a coeducational institution. The fact that it designates only women reminds us that the male school is thought of as the norm. Where woman is a modifier it notes an exception to the rule, as in woman doctor, women writer, woman mayor. The same generalization may be made in noting the usages: male nurse, male prostitute, and male secretary.

Students can focus upon the prejudice implied in simple name-calling. Advertisements for Gloria Steinem's new magazine, Ms. , suggest that use of this term may wipe out some of the more common designations for women: femme, dame, bitch, broad, chattel, biddy, little woman, frail, filly, skirt, chick, vixen, tomato, a rag of bone/ a hank of hair, bimbo, moll, squaw, babe, baby doll, bag, doll, wench, weaker sex, and lesser vessel. One could add:nymphomaniac, cold dish, groovy chick, real bring-down, neurotic, frigid wife, prostitute, whore, harlot, woman of the streets, member of the oldest profession, bad woman, occupant of house of ill fame, call girl, old maid, spinster, maiden lady, gay divorcee, grass widow, cat, kitten, pussy, bird, duck, old hen, cluck, gal, little old lady, sister, Women's Libber, bra burner, red hot mama, bluestocking, ADC mother, den mother, PTA room mother, block mother, housewife, homemaker, and faculty wife.

The question of the relative importance of education for men and for women is still an important issue. We must confront freshmen with the fact that sophisticated men, today as in the past, have viewed the education of woman as not only unnecessary but dangerous. Views like these collected by Robin Morgan (Sisterhood Is Powerful, Vintage, 1970, $2.45)startle most students: "When a woman inclines to learning, there must be something wrong with her sexual apparatus. (Nietzsche) "A man in general is better pleased when he has a good dinner than when his wife talks Greek." (Samuel Johnson) "The whole education of women ought to be relative to man. To please them, to be useful to them...to make life sweet and agreeable to them." (Rousseau) "A woman who is guided by the head and not the heart is a social pestilence." (Balzac) "Women...belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women." (Napoleon)

12

"Women should receive a higher education, not in order to become doctors, lawyers, or professors, but to rear their offspring." (Alexis Carrel) "It would be preposterously naive to suggest that a B.A. can be made as attractive to girls as a marriage license." (Grayson Kirk) "Women are usually more patient in working at unexciting, repetitive tasks...when women are encouraged to become competitive too many of them become disagreeable." (Dr. Benjamin Spock)

Norman Mailer's The Prisoner of Sex might be worth reading to illustrate the effective use of stereotypes in satire against women and to raise the question of whether attacks can be anti-feminist without being anti-woman. Mailer admits being frightened by an "honor guard of revolutionary vaginas," by "thin ladies with eyeglasses, no-nonsense features, mouths thin as bologna slicers, a babe in one arm, a hatchet in the other, gray eyes bright with bale-fire," and cannot understand Gloria Steinem's anger when he modifies his "Women at their worst are low sloppy beasts" with "Women at their best are goddesses." Most impressive of his stereotypes may be that describing the "battle-ax," Bella Abzug:

> Bella! the future Congresswoman with bosoms which spoke of buttermilk, cârnal abundance, and the firepower of hard-prowed gunboats....She had a voice which could have boiled the fat off a taxicab driver's neck. It was as full of vibrations of power as those machines which rout out the grooves in wood.

I would particularly recommend Flannery O'Connor's Everything That Rises Must Converge (Signet, Q4704, 95¢). Her stories not only reflect sex-related stereotypes, but reveal how the superficial categorizing of people in terms of race, age, weight, or religion brings tragedy.

V

Members of the profession should be willing to revise English courses which too narrowly center upon male writers, male critics, male characters, and male students from motives of intellectual integrity, not because women students or colleagues demand such a revision. Women's Studies courses and the hiring of more female teachers provide no substitute for this re-thinking of the curriculum and emphases in a whole department. In such revision, the first priority is to help undergraduates recognize occasional bias in otherwise sound literary criticism. For example, in a book frequently used by both undergraduates and graduates, The English Novel by Walter Allen, Allen provides helpful introductions to many fiction writers. However, in an otherwise perceptive discussion of George Eliot, he assumes that she was hard on all pretty girls in her novels because she was herself so homely. In justifying his reaction against what he sees as pretentiousness in the novels of Virginia Woolf, he describes in exaggerated terms the momentary scenes of revelation in her works as "a succession of short, sharp female gasps of ecstasy; an impression intensified by Mrs. Woolf's use of the semicolon where the comma is ordinarily enough." In speaking of Mrs. Gaskell, he subscribes too easily to ready-made formulations about the role of a woman in harmony with the society in which she finds herself." (He has just finished discussing Jane Austen who was less in harmony, since she was not the mother of a large family and the wife of a minister.) He also assumes that a woman writer cannot portray men and deals best with the limited scope of provincial family life. "Most of the time she knew enough to confine herself to domestic comedy...content to do what she can do well...The society delineated is almost entirely feminine...exactly the kind of social comedy in which women novelists traditionally excel....Where Mrs. Gaskell fails is where so many women novelists have failed: in the convincing delineation of men."

13

When our students are informed that women writers cannot successfully portray male characters, it is hoped they will soon be able to react critically and ask why the critics less often maintain that male writers do not successfully portray female characters. And more important, the modern student must endeavor to determine from his own examination of literature whether either statement is true. They must also see that biographical data more often influences critical judgments about women writers than about men writers, perhaps because women are thought to write more narrowly from their immediate background and with less imaginative detachment from actuality.

In the light of Elaine Showalter's findings (Dissertation, Davis, California, 1970) that Victorian women novelists received more favorable criticism before their female identity was divulged than for some time afterwards, the criticism of female writers by male critics must be regarded more cautiously, especially to see if such bias still prevails. The results of a current experiment in which some female MLA members have sent manuscripts out first with their given names and then with "male-sounding" initials to various academic journals may indicate such bias continues, since acceptance of papers identified with only the initials was running higher last winter. Women students may be within their rights to ask that papers be graded without names attached.

Samuel Goodrich estimated that half of the gross sales of the book industry in America from 1850 to 1855 were domestic novels by women writers. These years also saw the less popularly successful appearance of Walden, Leaves of Grass, Moby Dick, six works by Hawthorne and some by Emerson and Longfellow. Hawthorne angrily wrote that the whole country was given over to this "damned mob of scribbling women" and demanded that Tichnor explain to him "the mystery of these innumerable editions." The mystery still needs explanations. The writers were attacked as "bluestockings" but in their books they frowned on bluestockings and reinforced the idea that the happy woman's place was in the home. Granted that these works were inferior, perhaps it is time that literature courses again raise the question of the role of the woman writer in our general culture as well as in the history of great literature.

Other questions we can ask are: Can fiction written primarily to further the feminist movement be great literature? What is a pro-feminist book? Would it necessarily present admirable women? Does it need to present male characters? Should it primarily portray the discrimination against women by society?

Does a work need to be criticized favorably by both male and female critics in order to be hailed as a great work? Can a book be called a popular success if it is read largely by members of only one sex?

To what extent can literature be said to reflect the culture and thinking of any period in history when only men produced the literature of the period?

What is feminist criticism? Is it sexist criticism or a reaction against sexist criticism?

* For analysis of the textbooks cited on page 2 I am indebted to Iowa City elementary teachers, Corine Perkins and Ruth Graber.